

A HISTORY OF BETH SHOLOM CONGREGATION AND TALMUD TORAH

†Our Beth Sholom roots began during the first decade of this century, long before most of us were born, before even many of our parents and grandparents were born.† In 1908, a small group of men gathered together to form a Congregation.† They called it the Voliner Anshe Sfard Synagogue.† For the first two years they met in a member's home on 4-1/2 Street, S.W., then the center of Jewish life in the city.† Two years later, in 1910, the Congregation moved into their first official residence.† Even by then, they had saved enough money to buy land for a Synagogue Cemetery in Capitol Heights.

Some of the members were new to Washington; some were new to the United States.† Most of the early members worked in small businesses.† In the early years, they lived above the stores.† They worked long and hard hours to feed, clothe, shelter, and educate their children.† Still, they found time and money to help bring over relatives; they found time and money to help others get started.† They also found time and money for their Shul.† They were, in a very real sense, pioneers, pioneers who had a clear sense of priorities.† Judaism was a top priority.† The next time the Congregation moved, they purchased a former store and remodeled it.† This time, in this new home, the men sat downstairs and they built a balcony for the women.† In 1936, the Voliner Anshe Sfard Congregation combined with the members of Har Zion Congregation and Talmud Torah.† After much discussion, a new name was chosen to represent their union, "Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah."† Already, the Congregation had a well-attended and active Hebrew School.† In 1938, just two years later, the members began to build a new Synagogue at 8th and Shepherd Streets, N.W.† What an undertaking!† This was to be a beautiful building; it was even air conditioned.† Understandably, the members were concerned about the cost.† After all, it cost \$90,000.† Of course, this was in 1938 dollars.† You could buy an all brick three bedroom house in that beautiful suburban neighborhood for less than \$10,000.† And, making \$35.00 a week was doing very well.† "Eighth and Shepherd," as it was called by many, was to be the Congregation's home for 18 years.

Those years were dramatic, filled with great joys and terrible pain as well.† At Eighth and Shepherd, Beth Sholom members participated in services in its Sanctuary, celebrated weddings, and bar mitzvahs in its handsome auditorium.† Fathers and mothers prayed for sons in uniform; those same fathers and mothers worried about relatives still in Europe.† In those years at Eighth and Shepherd, Beth Sholom members raised their families; they raised funds for the war effort; they raised funds for their Shul, their Talmud Torah, and other community causes.† And then there was Israel.† Somehow, Beth Sholom members always found a way to help.†

In 1956, this building was sold.† The Congregation took up temporary residence in a storefront at Georgia and Alaska Avenues, N.W.† while its† new home was

planned and constructed.†When it was completed, the building at 13th Street and Eastern Avenue, N.W., was "state of the art."† The Sanctuary seated nearly 1200; the auditorium easily accommodated 500 for dinner.†The congregation began holding services and other events in its building at 13th and Eastern Avenue, N.W., in 1958.† The Hebrew School grew quickly and at its height registered over 400 students.†For its members and many visitors, the Congregation held daily services, two minyonim every morning and one minyon every evening.†In 1972, the Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah ventured onto new ground, and purchased a 3.3 acre parcel of land on Seven Locks Road in the beautiful area known as Potomac, Maryland.† In 1974, The William and Stella Robinowitz Hebrew School which also included the Cutler Chapel was constructed there.††

The ad book for the 38th annual banquet, held in 1978, celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation and the burning of the mortgage at 13th Street and Eastern Avenue.††† †In just four short years, attendance at services in the Potomac Facility Cutler Chapel grew to overflowing proportions.† A multi-purpose wing was added to the original building in 1979.† This modest facility housed an active Talmud Torah, a dynamic Nursery School, religious services, and countless other classes and activities for members and their families.†The Beth Sholom family in Potomac grew and grew.† Then, in August of 1993, Beth Sholom broke ground for Phase I of its Potomac facility.† This magnificent structure was dedicated with festive ceremonies in 1994.† Phase I† included two "state of the art" kitchens,† a magnificent atrium, a temporary sanctuary and a multi-purpose social hall which could be utilized for Yom Tov services as well as† social events and simcha† celebrations.††††† †Although the building at 13th Street & Eastern Avenue was sold, Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah continues to maintain a facility at the Blair Club for daily, Shabbat and Yom Tov services for its "downtown" members.† †Boasting "standing room only" Shabbat services, daily minyanim, an outreach program that attracts people from all over the metropolitan Washington area, a full-service Youth Program,† a thriving Talmud Torah and an excellent Early Childhood Center, the Congregation broke ground in August, 1999 for Phase II of its Potomac facility.†

The construction of†Phase II required the demolition of the Potomac building† erected in the 1970's and the use of temporary trailers for offices, classes and services during the building process.††† Ninety-two years after its meager beginnings on Four and One Half† Street in southwest Washington D.C,†† the Beth Sholom family is proud to enter the 21st century by† "Finishing what we started" - construction and dedication of Phase II, The Fox Wing,† of our Potomac facility.††††† †This is our physical history; the dates and addresses of our previous buildings.†But what of the heart of our Congregation's history?†

The memories of services; the people who sat beside us; in front of us, beside us.† The children we saw grow up; the parents we saw become elderly, the losses we experienced.† Beth Sholom members shared each other's lives.† The Shul was very much a part of daily life; it was daily prayers; it was also telephone calls and late night meetings.† It was going to a bris, a baby naming, or simply visiting the home of a newborn child.† It was visits to the sick.† It was also going to the funeral home, the cemetery, the shiva house.† It was rejoicing with one another; it was comforting one another.† It was being there for one another. It was the† experience of worshipping together;† the sharing of our excitement the first time our children led the Adon Olom, even before Bar Mitzvah.† The meals that nourished us; the camaraderie we shared.† Not only the apples and candy at Simchat Torah; but the candy on Shabbos from the member affectionately known as "The Candy Man."

Beth Sholom members -- men and women -- worked hard for the Shul. We remember our Sisterhood.† What a glorious Sisterhood the Shul had.† There were so many wonderful women.† And what fun they had.† They put on a production of "Fiddler on the Roof."† They had Queen Esther programs.† Mother's Day luncheons with surprise presentations to honor a "Mother of the Year."† Long before 1958, Beth Sholom ladies put on shows, sponsored carnivals and bazaars and worked hard in their Thrift Shop.† Year after year,† "the ladies" published a highly successful Ad Book and ran a profitable Gift Shop -- for the Sisterhood, for the Shul.† Annual Banquets were glamorous events.† The Shul had an active Mr. and Mrs. Club.† Beth Sholom breakfast lecture series brought outstanding people like Elie Weisel to us.† And concerts . . . we had the most magnificent cantorial concerts.† Through the Potomac† Steering Committee,† the Beth Sholom members who lived in Potomac set their priorities and turned their dreams into reality.† They "manned" the office,† made phone calls to insure there would be a minyon, led services, set up chairs, cleaned up after flood damage, and attracted many families to the all-too-small building on Seven Locks Road. Youth activities took on a new meaning in Potomac as our young families grew and brought more and more youngsters into the Shul.† Potomac even had its own Candy Man.† The Potomac members co-chaired many congregation events and initiated the Purim schpiels,† and Shabbatons.†† Potomac members became officers of the Congregation and served on the Board of Directors.† In time,† the Potomac Steering† Committee was abandoned and "Beth Sholom Potomac" and "Beth Sholom downtown" became one unified family.† Whether you call them volunteer professionals or professional volunteers, the men and women of Beth Sholom were wonderful.† They were sustainers.† They were nurturers.† Sure, they were busy making a living, making homes for their† loved ones.† They not only built buildings; they endowed those buildings with spirit and steadfastness.† They brought life to Beth Sholom.† This, then, is part of Beth Sholom's history, its heritage, its legacy of ongoing responsibility.† And, you, the Beth Sholom members of today, are continuing this tradition.† It is good to reflect on the years that have gone by and the work of our predecessors' hands and hearts.† They deserve this.† They deserve to be remembered.† It is

today's enthusiastic, dedicated, energetic and generous members who have brought Beth Sholom to life in Potomac. They have earned our respect and thanks for their hard work and generosity.† This group will lead Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah into the 21st Century.

With G-d's help, this congregation will sustain and nurture those who are the future of Beth Sholom Congregation and Talmud Torah.

The major portion of the above history was written and presented by Francis Feldman on the occasion of the dedication of the Phase One construction at the Beth Sholom Congregation property, 11825 Seven Locks Road, Potomac, MD. , November, 1994.† It was updated in May, 1998† and October, 2000 by Toby Berman.